

1. Learning summary – China

Panellist: Matteo Marchisio, Country Director for China, Republic of Korea, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Head of the East Asia Regional Hub and South-South Cooperation Centre, Beijing

IFAD response in China

Matteo Marchisio – In an emergency, IFAD needs to be able to come up with solutions and mobilize resources rapidly.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, IFAD adjusted its processes and procedures to allow the repurposing of IFAD financing within projects, to enable them to respond to the emergency. IFAD consulted the projects in the China portfolio, but none of them felt it was necessary at the time. There were two possible explanations. First, the activities in the project already contributed to strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable people when they dealt with shocks (be they market, climate, or health shocks). Therefore, there was no need to repurpose the project activities. Second, the option of repurposing the project came too late, when projects had already figured out alternative mechanisms to deal with the issue.

IFAD in China responded through non-lending instruments and focused on awareness raising activities related to impact on the most vulnerable, and on sectors beyond health and the economy (social, agriculture). The Fund's Beijing office also put forward an internal proposal for additional resources for a study on impacts of COVID-19 on smallholders and food security.

Other models of response have been used in Asian countries. Of particular interest is a model in India, where IFAD is bringing information to policy makers.

The central government has set up 11 Empowered Groups (EGs) to coordinate COVID-19 response activities across the country. These EGs engage with various stakeholders, including the UN agencies in India, for regular feedback about the situation on the ground. Under the current collaborative structure, the UN Food and Agriculture Group – made up of the Rome-based UN agencies (World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and IFAD), with support from UNICEF – shares information with EG5, which is in charge of supply chain logistics for all essential commodities, including food and agriculture-related items. The UN Group provides the EG5 with new information daily from the field – through project PMUs – so that it can take decisions on distribution of food and other matters of priority. This model does not require additional resources or new interventions.

Related knowledge resources, China

1. In China, the government is providing support to small-scale producers to both enhance their productivity and market the food they produce, also through e-commerce channels. [Torrero Cullen, M., 2020. COVID-19 and the risk to food supply chains: How to respond? Rome, FAO.](#)
2. Investing in building resilience and capacity in rural areas to cope with shocks is critical. This could include rehabilitating roads to reduce travel time, constructing irrigation systems to address increasingly unpredictable rainfall patterns, and installing water and sanitation systems to reduce water-borne diseases. [Marchisio, M. 2020. Fighting against COVID-19: the importance of building long-term resilience in rural communities. Rome, IFAD.](#)
3. This blog puts forward possible considerations to address food supply chain disruptions, including: (1) ensuring that food supply chains are fully functional, and (2) investing to improve food safety and hygiene standards of market infrastructures, food processing, and packaging facilities. [Reardon, T., Bellemare, T.R., Zilberman, D., 2020. COVID-19 may disrupt food supply chains in developing countries. Washington, DC, IFPRI](#)

2. Learning summary – Senegal

Panellist: Benoit Thierry, Country Director for Senegal, and Head of the West Africa Hub

IFAD response in Senegal

In Senegal and the Sahel, projects were readjusted quickly to address the short-term aspects of the crisis by supporting sanitary and hygiene efforts of local authorities (for example, training communities in good hygiene practices, distributing masks and disinfectant). In the medium-term, projects will supply agricultural inputs, including seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. There was no need to restructure projects: non-objections were provided to redirect funds for these purposes. At the same time, these approaches will be useful in the longer term, when value chains adapt to new modalities of cleanliness and safety.

Digital tools play an increasing role during crises like COVID-19. In Senegal, they are being used, for example, to: get information from the frontline to central government decision-makers; exchange knowledge and experience among farmers through social networks; and to support innovative approaches to market access. ICT tools and services are also key to better operationalizing cash transfers in rural areas, especially with adequate identification processes.

In a COVID-19 remote environment, developing on-line knowledge exchange networks, and platforms for projects and grassroots organizations, will be key. IFAD's West Africa Hub has developed www.weconnectfarmers.com, a knowledge repository offering online training, big data analysis and agritech apps to partners, especially farmers themselves.

Related knowledge resources, Senegal

1. During times of restricted movements, using digital platforms to decentralize marketing channels and minimize personal contacts could be useful to ensure connectivity between farms and markets. Dhulipala, R., 2020, [Leveraging digital tools for adaptive food systems in India during the COVID-19 lockdown](#). Washington, DC, CGIAR.
2. IFAD projects have changed delivery means, including by adopting digital solutions, to make them more appealing in a lockdown situation. For instance, in India, the Maharashtra's model of micro-ATMs has enabled members of women's self-help groups to deposit or withdraw cash in areas where bank penetration is low. Similarly, seed distribution practices in remote areas are inspiring

others with ideas for ensuring timely input supply, while maintaining compliance with public health structures. Mishra, M., 2020. [Collaborating in a time of crisis: Three early takeaways from the COVID-19 response in India](#). Rome, IFAD.

3. Experiences during previous pandemics and economic crises have shown that a range of transfer programmes and modalities can be effective in protecting vulnerable households, including those in the informal sector and poorer regions. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments are considering direct cash transfers to protect vulnerable households. Una, G., Pattanayak, S., Allen, R., Suc, G., 2020. [Digital solutions for direct cash transfers in the COVID-19 crisis](#). Washington, DC. IMF.
4. It is critical to prioritize the health of workers and consumers in food value chains. They should be able to practice physical distancing and other hygienic practices and have access to protective equipment to stay safe and healthy. FAO, 2020. [Responding to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on food value chains through efficient logistics](#). Rome, FAO.

Actionable recommendations

1. **Speed up IFAD's crisis response especially in non-lending activities** to strategically position IFAD as a more helpful member of in-country COVID-19 coalitions. IFAD's existing portfolio has the potential to respond to crises even in the short-term after light repurposing. Therefore, additional investment interventions, for example the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF) should be complementary and intelligently framed through evidence-based policy work.
2. **Grab the opportunity for "breakthrough" use of digital tools** as a standard approach in IFAD, not as an innovation. There is a new generation of young smallholders who are innovative and already making extensive use of digital tools and this population is growing. The RPSF includes digital services as one of its four areas of intervention, and it should be used decisively as a benchmark to mainstream ICT into IFAD's operations.